

FOR RELEASE: January 12, 1999

NMFS opens snapper season early *Paul succeeded in keeping '98 season open, still concerned by bag limits*

WASHINGTON, DC -- Gulf Coast fisherman received welcome news recently in the decision of the National Marine Fisheries Service's Southeast Region that red snapper fishing season would open on January 1, 1999, rather than on the previously announced March 1, 1999, date. Rep. Paul worked to ensure that the snapper season remained open for an extra two months in 1998. The season was due to be closed on the basis of "bad science," Paul said at the time. "I have spoken out strongly in opposition to federal snapper season closures, both in 1997 and 1998 and in the proposed 'pre-season' closure for 1999. I wrote to NMFS and the Gulf Council to express the view that the closing the '99 season before it opened was a bad decision." The pre-season closure, Rep. Paul told the NMFS, was based on an assumption that bag quotas were met before any data was collected.

Rep. Paul said he remains concerned by the notion of further reductions of bag limits -- from 5 in 1998 to the newly announced 4 -- of the Jan. 1 opening.

"I'm pleased NMFS has heeded my call to open the season, but I believe that further reducing the bag limit is a troubling situation." In an effort to circumvent the NMFS' restrictive rules, Rep. Paul has written to the Gulf Coast governors, proposing they take the red snapper population issue into their hands.

"I have been advocating that the governors and legislators of the Gulf states consider a multi-state compact which would help to renew the snapper population. This seems to me to be the best possible long-term solution."